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Cross-Border LL.M. a step closer to reality

SUNY Buffalo Law School's location on the Canadian border makes it an ideal choice for students who want to deepen their knowledge of cross-border legal issues. Now a proposed new master of laws program which builds on that strength has passed a critical milestone.

The Law School's faculty has voted to establish a Cross-Border Legal Studies LL.M. program. Once the initiative gains the approval of State University of New York trustees and American Bar Association accreditors, it will join the Law School's existing master of laws programs, the General Law LL.M. and the Criminal Law LL.M.

These intensive one-year degree programs appeal especially to practicing attorneys from around the world who want to develop their expertise in a particular area of law. (Unlike in the United States, legal education in most of the world is an undergraduate degree.)

"A huge amount of business that takes place in this city crosses the border," says **Professor David A. Westbrook**, the Law School's director for global strategic initiatives. "And because we are so close to the border, we feel particularly well situated to offer a degree in cross-border legal issues. In short, we are simply taking advantage of our location. But we want to make this new degree attractive to students from the United States and all over the world, as well as students from Canada. After all, cross-border practices happen all over the world."

The initiative, Westbrook says, fits with SUNY Buffalo Law's strategic plan to become more international in nature. As law schools nationwide cope with a decline in the number of applicants, he says, diversifying to attract international students makes fiscal sense. "The healthy population of the school going forward will be larger than it now is," he says, "and a lot of those people will not be traditional J.D. students from Western New York or New York

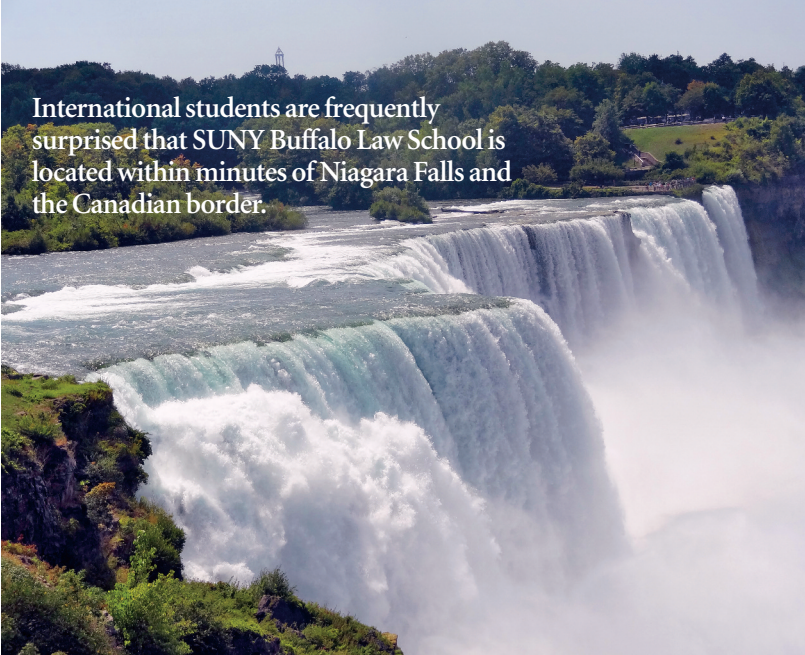
State or contiguous states."

The new LL.M. program dovetails with the work of the Cross-Border Legal Studies Center, whose name has been changed from Canada-U.S. Legal Studies Center to better reflect the breadth of the areas it includes.

The new name, says **Associate Professor Meredith Kolsky Lewis**, who directs the center, "conveys more accurately a sense of what we can offer by being on the border. People can come here and interact with lawyers who are doing cross-border work, and while that work may be primarily Canada-U.S. work, the issues that arise are similar whether you're dealing with the U.S. and Canada, or the U.S. and India, or any other two countries. Students can gain exposure to cross-border legal practice here, and then take that knowledge back home and apply it in their own countries or wherever they end up practicing."

Lewis says the Law School, which has already introduced a concentration in cross-border legal studies with the support of local alumni, will continue to draw on alumni support as the Cross-Border LL.M. program is rolled out, with a target date of fall 2016. "We have many alumni who are doing a wide range of international work right here," she says. "We look forward to sharing their expertise with our current and future students."

The degree program will require (and the concentration already requires) a hands-on capstone experience in the spring semester, in which students will be partnered with practicing attorneys to work on a wide range of le-



International students are frequently surprised that SUNY Buffalo Law School is located within minutes of Niagara Falls and the Canadian border.

gal issues that can crop up in cross-border practice. Already, she says, a number of large area firms have agreed to participate.

Lewis says the Cross-Border LL.M. will give students the opportunity to learn about many different types of cross-border work, including trade, immigration, tax, environmental and transactional matters. "A lot of people find the idea of doing international work attractive," she says, "but they might not really know the breadth of what that can entail. Many students are going to end up working in the private sector. Law firms and companies regularly deal with international transactions and a host of international issues. This program is an attractive opportunity for them to get exposure to a wide range of issues all in one place. The border is a laboratory where students can experiment to discover what interests them within the breadth of cross-border legal practice and to gain experience in those areas."